Developments with the Commission's Longitudinal Student Data System

The Commission is using its Longitudinal Student Data System (LSDS) to examine the movement of students through California's public colleges and universities. The system consists of enrollment and awards data from the University of California, the California State University, and the California Community Colleges. The data include student identifiers provided in accordance with AB 1570 (Ch. 916, Statutes of 1999).

The data are being used to develop the performance measures in the accountability framework adopted at the Commission's June 2006 meeting. For example, the agenda for the December 2006 Commission meeting includes a report presenting four and five-year graduation rates for UC and CSU campuses, broken down by ethnicity and gender. That report's figures are based on the progress of full-time students, because graduation rates averaged over all students are misleading when a university system emphasizes accessibility to part-time students, or students who cannot afford to enroll continuously. One of the strengths of using the identified data in the LSDS is that the analysis can follow a student's enrollment history and distinguish between students who continuously enroll full time and those who take a part-time load, or who enroll intermittently.

The Commission has also used these data to look more closely at student persistence. An earlier Commission analysis using the LSDS showed that nearly a quarter of full-time freshmen fail to continue with full-time studies in their second year. The December 2006 agenda includes the results of a more detailed analysis of enrollment records for these students, showing how many enroll intermittently, how many drop down to a part-time load, and how many drop out entirely. This analysis will help the Commission identify obstacles that students face in moving forward to complete their degrees and show how these obstacles affect different ethnic groups or students from high schools in low-income areas.

Another performance measure to be presented at the December 2006 meeting is the time-to-degree of students transferring from the community colleges to the four-year systems. Progress of transfer students is an important issue because transfer has great potential for broadening access to the four-year systems, and the time taken for students to navigate this process and complete requirements is always a concern.

Linking the System to other Sources of Data

The LSDS identifies a student's high school, which allows the Commission to conduct analyses showing how time-to-degree and other measures of student progress are related to characteristics of a particular high school. This analysis is useful in developing policies to give students from all backgrounds more opportunity to succeed in the university systems.

Commission staff has used GIS software to build a system linking high schools to data from the U.S. Census. This system can be used to build tables showing incomes in the area around each school and other characteristics of the local population, such as the percentage of the population in professional occupations or the percentage of the population with a university education. These data supplement

school data available from the California Department of Education, such as a school's Academic Performance Index (API) or the percentage of students eligible for subsidized lunches. Initial analysis using this system shows that students from high schools in poorer areas have lower university persistence rates than students from schools in high-income areas.

Additional Data Elements

Work is in progress to enhance the Longitudinal Student Data System by adding more data elements:

- **Admission basis.** The data provided by CSU includes an element showing whether a student was regularly admitted or admitted by exception on account of athletic ability, socioeconomic disadvantages, or artistic talent. Admission basis is an important consideration in assessing student progress. For example, trends in graduation rates may be affected by changes in the proportion of students admitted by exception.

  The UC data did not include information on admission basis when originally provided. UC has now added admission basis data element, making the data more consistent between segments. This information will allow the Commission to conduct analyses of student progress that distinguishes between regularly-admitted students and students who are admitted by other criteria.

- **Students' zip codes.** The LSDS includes the county of residence for UC and CSU students, but this information is not available in the community college data. Because community college students generally attend colleges near their home or place of work, information on the location of students is essential in examining many access-related issues such as the availability of facilities serving rural areas.

  The California Community College Chancellor's office has now included zip codes in the enrollment data available to the Commission. Work is in progress linking zip codes to counties so that the community college enrollment data will have an element that is consistent with the residence county in the UC and CSU data.

- **Course of study information.** The enrollment data for UC and CSU identifies students' declared majors. Comparable information is not available in the community college data. However, an indication of discipline or program type for community college students would be useful in developing a better understanding of enrollment patterns. For example, the Commission could follow a transfer student's enrollment history and distinguish between units taken in preparation for transfer and other community college work such as units taken toward a certificate or training for a job-related skill.

  Staff is also assessing how to bring discipline or program information into the community college data. This is not a simple project because the Chancellor's Office data system does not assign a discipline or program code to each student – instead, discipline information is recorded for the individual courses taken by the student. Nevertheless, bringing this information into the LSDS would be very useful, particularly because the community colleges offer a wide range of programs and serve many different types of students who have a wide variety of educational goals.